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Telling the Truth and False Confessions

INTRODUCTION

If an individual in police custody is asked whether they were present at a particular time and place, it would seem obvious that their response will either be the truth or a lie. They admit being there (truth) or they deny being there when they were (lie). However, in this situation, and in everyday life, truth and lie is not a simple dichotomy. Information that is not true can be given in a number of ways.

Gozna (1999) listed five reasons for lying: to obtain an advantage; to avoid punishment; to avoid embarrassment; to protect another (from the truth); and to manage social interactions (eg: false compliments). These reasons could be divided into good motives (eg: protecting another) and bad motives (eg: avoiding punishment) for lying.

In this context, lying is seen as knowing one thing but deliberately telling another thing. What is interesting is when individuals give false information other than lying. Table 1 lists some of the different types of false information.

Intentional deception/lying: full or partial

- for good motives
- for bad motives
- lying by silence
- omission
- equivocation (being unclear)
- exaggeration/hype
- misinformation
- unsubstantiated claims

Unintentional deception/"honest liar"

- mistaken
- self deceit
- impression management
- exaggeration/hype
- unconscious (psychodynamics)
- confabulation
- delusion (mental illness)

Table 1 - Types of false information.

It is possible to distinguish the giving of false information along two criteria: believe - don't believe, and true - false (figure 1).

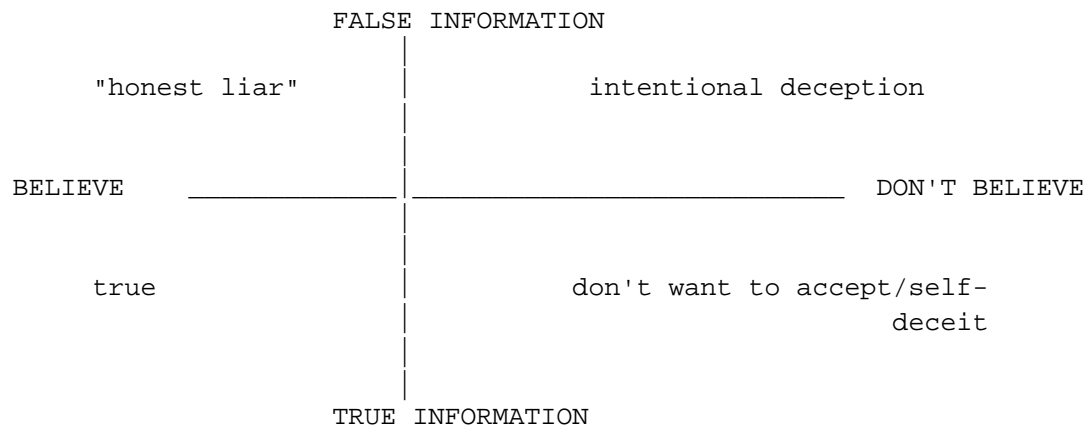


Figure 1 - Two criteria for distinguishing false information.

INTENTIONAL DECEPTION AND LYING

Wilson (2003) defined lying as:

(A) verbal statement made by one person to another in the knowledge that, based on the speaker's understanding of the truth at the time, he or she (the speaker) is actively intending that the hearer accept as true that which the speaker knows to be something other than the truth (p30).

While intentional deception includes evasions, omissions, verbal distortion, withholding or selective information giving, or misleading by suggestion (Wilson 2003). It seems for Wilson that lying is an active process, and intentional deception is a passive one.

For Higgs (1985), the intention is the same in both cases: "we intend to deceive". But the motivation behind lying is important. For many people, the "white lie" for good motives (eg: to save another's feelings) is acceptable, if not desirable.

Wilson (2003) was realistic:

I am aware that choosing to tell the truth rather than a lie in all cases, and in so doing choosing the same for everyone else, would place a major responsibility on each and every one of us. For some people such a situation might be unacceptable or even an impossible state of affairs (p35).

Wilson used the example of "Cora" who "had been recently cheered up, after a long bout of depression, and was actively and positively engaged in therapy". A health care professional has heard some bad news for "Cora", would withholding the information for some time be wrong?

Surely, in this case, intentional deception by the health care professional is advantageous to this individual?

It is a debate in itself as to when a "white lie" should be used for good motives. But two questions arise from the example of "Cora" - how does "Cora" feel when she finds out (particularly knowing the information was withheld), and what affect will it have upon the relationship with the health care professional?

More often than not, lying is for bad motives, particularly in relation to the police interview. Here individuals are trying, in some way, to protect themselves (or others) with false information or a lack of true information.

It is knowing something that the authorities want, should or need to know. This situation has produced a debate, especially in the USA, about whether it would be right to use torture to gain the true information from a suspect about potential/future acts of terrorism. This has been called the "ticking bomb" scenario by Harvard law professor, Alan Dershowitz (Zizek 2006).

Hype

Hype is an interesting variation on intentional deception. This can be seen in advertising or by individuals as exaggeration, misinformation or unsubstantiated claims. In a society where advertising is so dominant, and this produces general cynicism as a reaction, the normality of hype is accepted. When a company claims that their washing powder is the greatest product ever made (or at least until their next washing powder is made), then it is known that this is not true. It is a washing powder, more or less, the same as other washing powders.

"The excess of praise for products leads to 'marketing the self' (ie: excessive claims about the self). This leads to the need for everything to be 'fantastic' rather than just 'good'" (Brewer 2004 p9).

The social construction of the normality of hype is then manifest through individual's claims in job interviews that they are the greatest candidate ever applying for the job, for example. Job interviewers are forced to discount such claims in the interview, and assume that only part of the claims are true. But if an individual tells the truth in a job interview, it is discounted like the claims of others. Thus there is no incentive to tell the truth in such situations, and hype becomes normal (table 2).

"Hype" candidate

"True" candidate

"I am 100% perfect candidate"	"I am 75% perfect candidate"
Discounted by interviewer to 50% perfect candidate	Discounted by interviewer to 25% perfect candidate

No incentive to tell the truth

Table 2 - Telling the truth in job interviews.

The exaggeration of their abilities by individuals, in fact, is more than intentional deception because they come to believe they have those abilities. The hype becomes unintentional deception.

The other consequence of hype is that truth becomes lost. For example, in 2003, James Frey produced his memoirs about overcoming addiction. However, many events in the book were proved to have not taken place quite as written. Frey defended himself by saying that his book was "emotional truth" (Shisler 2006). It appears that the publishers felt that it would sell more copies if the book was presented as a true story rather than as fiction. Behind the hype of advertising is the reality of "consumer capitalism" (Brewer 2001) - it is about selling products whatever it takes.

UNINTENTIONAL DECEPTION

There are situations where individuals believe that they are telling the truth, but, in fact, the information given is false. This can come about in a number of ways.

Mistakes

Research on eye-witness testimony has shown that recall of events is far from perfect. Memory is not a video-tape, and eye-witness recall is not finding the correct point on the tape. Honest eye-witness recall can be influenced by factors at the point of acquisition (eg: attention paid to certain elements), during storage (eg: assumptions made), and at retrieval of the memory (eg: information after the event recalled as part of the event) (Brewer 2000).

Two classic examples of experiments by Elizabeth Loftus can be used here. In Loftus (1979), she showed how previous associations can become worked into the memory for an event.

Participants watched a short film in which person A was seen talking to person B about a robbery. Later in the film person A committed a robbery with an unseen

accomplice. Participants tended to recall person B as the accomplice when questioned after the film.

Loftus (1975) has shown how information can be added to a particular memory after the event and later recalled as part of the event itself. Students were shown a film showing a car driving in the countryside and having an accident. Half the participants were asked immediately afterwards a misleading question about the speed of the car when it passed the barn, when there was no barn in the film. One week later, those participants asked the misleading question were five times more likely to recall a barn compared to the control group.

These examples show that eye witnesses can believe that they are telling the truth, but their information is incorrect. As to the accuracy or inaccuracy of eye-witness recall, this is influenced by various factors. But studies from real-life cases do sometimes contradict experimental studies.

Confabulation is the inclusion of false information into memory. It is most often associated with brain damage. In other words, individuals make up reasons and memories for things. Kopelman (1987) distinguished two types of confabulation.

Provoked confabulation is the "plausible but inaccurate" recall of events, and spontaneous confabulation is the production of fantasies and false memories. The latter is seen in frontal lobe damage, and the former in Korsakoff's syndrome, for example (Alcohol Concern 2001).

Self-Deceit and Delusions

It is often assumed that individuals have reasonably accurate pictures of themselves and the world, unless there is something wrong with them. So delusions are associated with mental illness and a clear abnormality in thinking.

But it is possible to argue that delusions are an everyday part of life. In other words, individuals hold views about themselves and the world which are clearly not true, and such individuals are not mentally ill.

Beese and Stratton (2004) found "normal" reasoning processes underlying delusional beliefs of patients interviewed from a Leeds psychiatric hospital. The thirty-one patients were all diagnosed with delusional thinking, defined as "a false, unshakeable belief which is out of keeping with the subject's educational and social background" (p269) (eg mother is Count Dracula). The "normal" reasoning processes related to the attribution of cause (eg: external attributions for

negative events).

Delusions, then, are presented as a continuum (figure 2).



Figure 2 - Delusions continuum.

Self-deceit can also be part of impression management. Impression management means that we adapt what we say and do to influence and impress others. As mentioned earlier under intentional deception, society encourages exaggeration and hype (as in job interviews) and individuals come to believe such claims.

Gilovich (1991), for example, in a US educational survey, found that 60% of students thought they were in the top 10% in terms of their ability to get along with others, and 25% felt they were in the top 1%. In such surveys, individuals tend to place themselves above average for desirable characteristics and below average for undesirable ones. Is this just wishful thinking?

Apparently, we have a tendency to believe propositions we want to be true even when an impartial investigation of readily available data would indicate that they probably are false. A plausible hypothesis about that tendency is that our wanting something to be true sometimes exerts a biasing influence on what we believe (Mele 1997).

In other words, we believe what we want to believe. This can be applied to health messages where individuals will respond only if they feel it is relevant to them. But, again, individuals will underestimate their own risk of health dangers compared to the average. This has been called the "illusion of safety in a risky world" (Thompson et al 1996).

Renner et al (2000), for example, asked participants to estimate their own and an average peer's risk of cardiovascular diseases. All of the age groups rated their own risks below average, except the 60 years and above group. However, this group still rated their risk as less than the average peer. For example, the 31-40 years age group gave a mean absolute risk judgement of -0.54 for themselves and -0.17 for the average peer (where average risk is zero), while the 51-60 years group estimated -0.24 and +0.34 respectively.

Weinstein (1987) found this optimism bias for risk

judgements with thirty-two different behaviours in a telephone survey, varying from food poisoning, tooth decay, and diabetes to mugging.

Mele (1997) described four processes in thinking that contribute to self-deception:

i) Negative misinterpretation

The desire for something to be true leads to a downplaying or ignoring of negative information. For example, a person who believes that they are a good golfer will explain their poor scores as due to external causes (like bad luck or poor weather) rather than the lack of golfing skill.

ii) Positive misinterpretation

This is the tendency to interpret negative information as positive support for the desire. A man asks a woman for a date, but she refuses saying she is not interested in him. He interprets this rejection (negative information) as a strategy by her (eg: "playing hard to get"), and as a sign that he must work harder to get her. Thus no does not actually mean no when he wants something to be true.

Add to this scenario, ideas like "if you fail, try again" and "the path of true love is never easy", and discourses like "no means yes". So he will continue to believe that she wants to date him (but does not know it yet).

In romantic situations, this is seen as unrequited love, or more disturbingly, it is the basis of stalking behaviour.

One type of stalking known as delusional stalking (Bates 1999) can be seen in conditions like "morbid infatuation" and "erotomania". It is based in the belief that the relationship will happen or even does exist despite no or contradictory evidence. The victim may be telling the stalker that they do not love them (or even know them) but that is interpreted as a secret message admitting love. It is a matter of degree between this type of stalker and the self-deceived persistent "normal" suitor. In extreme cases, there is a massive difference, but, in other cases, less so.

Interestingly, Canter and Heritage (1990), in their profiling of types of male sexual attackers, described a group who saw the attack as part of developing a relationship and even asked for the woman's phone number for a future date.

iii) Selective focusing/attending

This is focusing on what is desirable and away from the undesirable. An individual fears that their partner is unfaithful. It is possible to focus upon all the evidence against such an undesirable situation, like the partner denying it or believing that the partner's love would stop such behaviour.

iv) Selective evidence-gathering

This is a "combination of 'hyper-sensitivity' to evidence.. for the desired state of affairs and 'blindness' - of which there are, of course, degrees - to contrary evidence.." (Mele 1997).

It is easy to say that surely individuals know their beliefs are wrong and they are just pretending. But the point of self-deception is that individuals genuinely believe what they believe.

For example, Snow and Anderson (1993) noted three processes used by individuals living on the streets in a large US city to cope with their situation:

a) Distancing - This is the where individuals emphasise that they are not like other homeless people and thereby distances themselves from that social identity. A "narrative" is produced which shows how the individual is only temporarily a member of this social category or the reason for being so is different to others (eg: "they are here because of being lazy, me due to bad luck");

b) Embracement - The acceptance of aspects of a social identity but for specific reasons. For example, an "ideological embracement": living on the streets as an alternative to the materialism of society;

c) Fictive storytelling - Exaggeration of past events and future possibilities to further emphasise that the individual is not really part of this group. Fantasising about the future is reinforced by a society where fame is just around the corner for everyone (Brewer 2002).

Katz (1960) noted that one function of an attitude is "ego-defensive" - helps in the protection of the self.

This is not to say that individuals cannot become aware that their beliefs are false.

Two theories have been used to explain the genuineness of self-deception: evolutionary and

psychodynamics. In the former, self-deception evolved as a subtler form of deceiving others (Trivers 1985). It is so much better to deceive others if you believe something yourself.

For psychodynamics (eg: Freud 1940), conscious understandings of the world and the self are false and distorted to avoid anxiety:

We are not rational truth-seekers attempting to model the world in as accurate a way as we can. Rather, we are defended creatures who distort reality because we cannot bear the psychological pain of the truth. We construct versions of the world that compromise between enough accuracy for physical survival and enough distortion to reduce the psychological pain of existence to bearable levels (Thomas 1996 p288).

So we could not have an accurate picture of ourselves even if we wanted to, according to psychodynamics.

FALSE CONFESSIONS

Kassin and Wrightsman (1985) suggested three types of false confession: voluntary, coerced-compliant, and coerced-internalised. In each case, the individual may believe what they are saying or know full well that they are lying (table 3).

	INDIVIDUAL BELIEVES THAT FALSE CONFESSION IS TRUE
Voluntary	
- due to mental illness	yes
- to protect others	no
- "fame"	no
Coerced-compliant	no
Coerced-internalised	yes

Table 3 - Types of false confession.

Voluntary False Confession

In this case, the individual gives the police false information knowing the truth in order to protect others, or for fame or attention.

Fame is a very powerful motivation in a society where fame has become a commodity with its own value. Thus individuals can achieve fame for something of no ultimate value other than being the "flavour of the month".

Brewer (2001) has argued that "consumer capitalism" is a form of "civil religion", and within this context, "salvation by fame" has become the fast track to the top of the social hierarchy. This also applies to infamy. For example, TV crews making films about the lives of serial murderers is fame in this sense (Brewer 2003) ¹.

In the case of individuals with mental illness who confess, they can believe that they are telling the truth. The problem may be distinguishing fact from fantasy as a consequence of a delusional state or severe depression (Gudjonsson and MacKeith 1990).

Henry Lee Lucas, in the US, confessed to over six hundred murders between 1983 and 1985, and many robberies. He even confessed to fictitious cases for immediate gains, like cigarettes, while in prison. He had low self-esteem and enjoyed the attention, while being eager to please and impress people. Gudjonsson (1999) felt that Lucas may have suffered from a personality disorder, so that lying was seen as unimportant and there was no thought of the long-term consequences of the behaviour.

In England, Russell Keys confessed to five murders, among other things, in Blackpool in the 1980s. It appears that his wife, who later killed him, was coercing him to confess in order to sell stories to US newspapers for large sums of money (Cutting Edge 2001). These cases could actually be included as coerced-internalised false confessions.

Coerced-compliant False Confession

The stress of arrest and the pressure of police questioning produces a false confession, but the individual knows it is a lie. The suspect may believe that confessing will allow them to go home. Factors here include the effects of hunger, lack of sleep, and fear (Stone et al 2000), as well as interrogation technique used by police, length of time kept in custody and interrogated, and degree of access to solicitor, family or friends (Carson et al 1993).

The police officers may be convinced that the suspect is guilty, and even without the use of physical torture, the individual confesses from the pressure (both implicit and explicit).

Often these confessions are retracted when the individual is out of the pressure of the questioning, and

¹ In a survey of three document channels (Discovery, History, and UKTV People) in one week (8-14th April 2006), of 420 hours of programmes, I found 17.4% of the programmes were related to crime and criminals. Many of them about the lives of "famous" criminals. However, this figure did include the repeat of programmes.

also realises the consequences of their actions. This is not to say that coerced-internalised confessions are not retracted at a later date.

Generally, Irving and Hilgendorf (1980) estimated that around 40% of suspects could be classed as in a "normal" mental state during a police interview. Their survey of sixty cases showed problems like the suspect affected by alcohol or drugs (18% of cases) through to frightened (13%), withdrawn (8%) or aggressive (12%).

Coerced-internalised False Confession

In some ways, this type of false confession is the most interesting for psychologists. Individuals come to believe that their confession is true, usually because of the stress of the situation or the expectations of the questioners. For example, the suspect may be mistakenly informed about the details of a crime which they later repeat. This is taken by the police officer as evidence of guilt (MacKeith 1992).

Gudjonsson (1995) reported the case of "Mr.J", a volunteer fire officer, who confessed to arson. Four factors combined to explain the confession - an eagerness to please, trust and respect for the police, a lack of confidence in his own memory, and high suggestibility.

While Gudjonsson (1990) found the key characteristics of one hundred individuals who retracted their confessions to be lower intelligence, and increased scores on tests of suggestibility and compliance. For Ofshe (1989), individuals who falsely confess are persuaded that they did commit the crime despite any memory of it, and that there is a reason why they cannot remember (eg: blocking out of trauma).

The important point is that individuals who make this type of confession are not mentally ill.

There are three main groups of factors involved in this type of false confession:

i) Vulnerability

This includes an eagerness to please the authority figures/others, the need for attention, and/or the belief that the police would not get it wrong. So if a police officer is convinced, then the suspect, in this situation, comes to believe that they must have done it.

ii) Memory

The individual either has a poor memory and/or comes to doubt their own recall of events.

Kassin and Kiechel (1996 quoted in Feldman 1998) created in an experiment the situation of false confession and recall. Participants were asked to perform a reaction time experiment on a computer, but were told not to touch the "ALT" key. The participants were accused, in the middle of the experiment, of touching the "ALT" key by an ardent witness.

Of the participants, 69% admitted touching it, though CCTV showed they had not. Around one-third of participants admitted to a third party later, and these were classed as coerced-internalised false confessions, and 10% claimed they could recreate the "crime" from memory.

iii) Suggestibility

In a high pressure interview situation, individuals who accept an implicit or explicit suggestion from the questioner are given positive feedback. Some individuals will respond sooner to the suggestion than others. In other words, differences in the level of suggestibility.

Gudjonsson (1992) listed the characteristics of suggestible individuals as including the following: high in acquiescence, anxiety, fear of negative evaluation, and social desirability, and low in assertiveness, intelligence, memory, and self-esteem.

It seems that poor recall and suggestibility go hand in hand, but, for Gudjonsson (2003), it is not clear whether it is poor memory full stop that creates suggestibility or just poor memory for the event.

Tests have been developed to measure an individual's level of suggestibility, like the Gudjonsson Suggestibility Scale (GSS) (Gudjonsson 1984). The GSS involves telling the listener a story and then adding information later. How much later information is recalled in the story and how much is accepted of the word of the authority figure are the basis of the measure of suggestibility. A higher score is a greater level of suggestibility (table 4).

Gudjonsson (1991) found differences in the mean scores in three groups of suspects: 12.5 for suspects who later retracted confessions, 10 for true confessors, and four for resisters (not confessed despite pressure). The average population mean is 7.50.

There are two versions of GSS - 1 and 2 (Gudjonsson 1997) - with strengths and weaknesses (table 5).

...they saw a small boy/going down a steep slope/on a bicycle/ and calling for help./ Anna and John ran after the boy/ and John caught hold of the bicycle/and brought it to a halt./

Leading questions eg Did the boy drop the books he was carrying whilst riding the bicycle?

// = part for scoring recall

(After White and Willner 2005)

Table 4 - Extract from GSS2

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
- easy to use	- limited usefulness with individuals with low IQ or limited language
- simple measure of "interrogation suggestibility"	- confusion in results for individuals who find it hard to express themselves
- not obvious: hides real purpose of test	- story of no personal relevance and thus can overestimate level of suggestibility (White and Willner 2005)
- test-retest reliability	- individuals can see through the purpose of the test

Table 5 - Main strengths and weaknesses of the GSS.

Santtila et al (1999) compared the cases of two types of false confessions to a post office robbery in Finland. The GSS scores were clearly different (table 6).

	"Mr.S" 21 years old	"Ms.A" 22 years old
Type of confession	coerced-internalised	coerced-compliant
Total suggestibility score		
GSS1	15.0	7.0
GSS2	15.0	12.0

(After Santtila et al 1999)

Table 6 - Differences in GSS scores on two types of confessions.

Pressure of the Situation

It seems that the emphasis is upon the individual, and who will "succumb" to false confession factors. But the situation is the key. Social pressure can change behaviour and produce "increasingly implausible memories" (Malinowski et al 1998).

Asch (1951), in a classic experiment of group pressure and conformity, asked individuals to say in front of a group of people which two of four drawn lines were the same length. The answer was obvious. But a number of the group members deliberately gave the wrong answer. Would the "real participants" (the others in the group were working for the experimenter) follow their own judgements and give the obvious correct answer or conform to the group with the wrong answer? The participants conformed in about one-third of the trials.

Ofshe (1989) listed two groups of "tactics" by the police linked to false confessions:

a) Tactics that occur in all cases of false confession - certainty of guilt by police; isolation from alternative views (eg: social support); long interrogation with emotional pressure; and an apparently believable reason for why the interviewee cannot remember committing the crime;

b) Tactics that occur in some cases of false confession - claims of scientific proof of guilt; reminding interviewee of factors that reduce their confidence in their recall (eg: past alcohol-related memory loss); demands that interviewee accept the "truth"; and use of fear of punishment for not co-operating.

Coerced-internalised false confessions have a lot in common with false memories of childhood abuse. Ost et al (2001) questioned twenty individuals in the UK and US who had recovered memories of abuse during therapy, but later retracted them. Thirteen of the respondents appeared to fit the coerced-internalised type of false confession, three coerced-compliant, and four voluntary.

Certainty of the fact of the abuse by the therapist was evident for 80% of respondents. Respondents were told things like "you have all the dynamics of an incest family" (respondent 13) or "you have all the symptoms of someone who had been abused, so you must have been sexually abused" (respondent 19) (Ost et al 2001 p559).

Ost et al found evidence of all the "tactics" quoted by Ofshe above in varying degrees; eg: isolation from alternative views (50% of respondents) to use of fear for not co-operating (10%).

CONCLUSIONS

Is it possible to tell whether an interviewee is lying is an age-old question. Many suggestions have been made in relation to looking for non-verbal cues. These include characteristics of liars like blinking more, and higher speech pitch, as well as "micro-expressions" (eg: minute smiles) only visible on frame-by-frame video analysis.

Many of the non-verbal cues are also signs of stress, as are the measurements made by polygraphs (Brewer 2000). Often there are stereotypical characteristics of how liars behave which police officers use, but the police are no better than chance at detecting deception (Vrij 2001).

It is felt that it may be better to study what the individual actually says. One systematic way to do this is known as Statement Validity Analysis (SVA) or statement reality analysis (Undeutsch 1982). The aim is to find content characteristics that show the individual did or did not experience or see what they are reporting. Undeutsch argued that true events are reported differently to false ones with richer levels of detail, and clearer linkage to other events of the person's life, for example.

Thus the "Undeutsch hypothesis" assumes that truthful narratives can be distinguished from untruthful ones through their form and structure. But, of course, no system is perfect.

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Is Marriage a Resource in the Construction of Women's Identity? A Discourse Analytic Answer

INTRODUCTION

Stevens and Wetherell (1996) suggested the construction of identity was a principal distinguishing feature of contemporary society. Owing to society no longer providing a firm value base, individuals now look to the self as a source of meaning and value. Consequently, individuals are absorbed in a constant process of improving and constructing their personal and social identities (Baumeister 1986; Gauntlett 2002).

Gauntlett (2002) suggested the media had an important influence on the construction process. Magazines provide a myriad of suggestions for identity and lifestyle. Individuals think through their sense of self in relation to these representations, and internalise the proposed norms and values (Gauntlett 2002). Power inequalities implicit in these representations are also internalised, and, can go on to be viewed as natural and normal (Morant 1997).

Media representations of women are now wildly diverse, the most prominent of which, being that of "girl power". This representation constructs women as confident, tough and independent (Gauntlett 2002); however, this representation normally demands that women simultaneously maintain a perfect physical appearance (McRobbie 1999). Whereas men are defined by social status or intellect, women tend to be represented in terms of their physical appearance and relationship to men (Stevens and Wetherell 1996).

Baumeister (1986) suggested that many aspects of life had become subordinated to the development and construction of identity. One aspect in particular, is an individual's personal relationships. Baumeister argued that in contemporary society, if a relationship ceases to be conducive to the development of the self, then an individual is justified in moving on.

Motivated by this suggestion, this study is concerned with examining the way women and non-platonic relationships are constructed and represented by the media: principally, to discover if involvement in a relationship is suggested to have an effect on women's identity.

METHOD

I decided to analyse the representations found in wedding magazines. W.H.Smith Ltd stocked the greatest number, and of the seven in stock, I concentrated on the three more affordable options. I eventually purchased the April/May 2005 edition of "Cosmopolitan Bride" as it contained the most written articles.

As it was directly concerned with the effect marriage had on a woman's identity, I decided to perform a discourse analysis on an article entitled "Why marriage = a sexier, happier, healthier you".

Discourse analysis is a form of qualitative research, which aims to identify and make visible discourses and underlying assumptions present in an extract of text (Banister et al 1994; Potter 2004). It is also important, however, to "deconstruct", or make visible, what is absent in a text, as Derrida (cited in Burr 1995) suggested that an item's meaning or identity is also defined by that which it is not.

The article was read a number of times and a number of discourses were revealed.

FINDINGS

The discourse of "knowing"

"Knowing my husband will..."
"I know he'll be there..."
"knows what I need"
"to know he'll fancy me..."

This discourse suggests that once a woman is married she "knows" and may rest safely assured that her husband will be there for her, both physically and emotionally. A husband's support is constructed as being unwavering and lifelong, continuing to be given until his wife is "old and wrinkly". Husbands will always "know" exactly what their wives need and will be able to provide this for them.

"Knowing" for women is constructed as automatic and guaranteed once married. Marriage is constructed in this article as permanent, and something that rids women of all uncertainty and insecurity. By marrying, a woman guarantees herself a lifelong partner who she "knows" will always find her sexually attractive.

Alongside this discourse is the unstated assumption of "not knowing", which implies that unmarried women are insecure and uncertain. This article constructs married and unmarried women differently, as attached unmarried women "don't know" and "can't be certain" about their

partners. This discourse also implies that unattached women may not feel secure and confident in themselves, as they cannot "know" as they do not have a man to support or find them physically attractive.

The "emotional, unbalanced woman" and "the stabilising influence of marriage" discourses

"balance out their moods"

"manic people..."

"used to have real highs and lows, but Andy stops me from going too far either way" - Karen

"my moods"

"more in control of your life"

The article contains at least eight references to how women "feel"

This discourse constructs and represents women as being unbalanced and highly emotional (reinforced by the number of references to how women "feel"); men implicitly, are calm, rational and stable. Women's manner, however, can be cured by marriage. Husbands are viewed as stabilising influences, ensuring their wives do not experience extreme emotions.

There is an assumption here that (women) experiencing extreme moods is negative and that even-temperedness is more appropriate; an assumption that Karen (detailed above) has internalised and accepted. Being married is said to make a woman feel like she is "more in control" of her life.

The unstated assumption is that unmarried women are emotional, unstable and "out of control". This is a contradiction in terms, as having to compromise with another person would surely mean a married woman was less in control of her life.

The discourse of "togetherness"

"planning your future together"

"doing things together"

"working together"

"we're a team"

The assumption is once married you will not be alone anymore, and consequently, not be lonely, as everything will be done with your husband. The unwritten assumption is that if you are in a couple, but are unmarried, the idea of "togetherness" is not guaranteed. "Togetherness" is viewed as better than being alone, as "going it alone" is constructed as not "fun".

A married couple is constructed as a "team", which implies that any opposition the couple experience will be

overcome together.

The "couldn't be happier" discourse

"happier"
"burst of happiness"
"feel-great"
"impossible to have a negative thought"
"how happy you'll be"
"more fun"

This discourse constructs marriage as such a happy experience, that negative thoughts and sadness will no longer be experienced (but how do women know happiness, without knowing unhappiness as a point of comparison?).

Married women are constructed as almost transcending their previous unmarried selves, (when they were not happy) now finding happiness and enjoyment in everything that life offers, even "cleaning".

Marriage is constructed as affecting women much like a powerful drug would, resulting in them experiencing everlasting "highs". The underlying assumption is that unmarried women can never be as happy. A contradiction is apparent as this discourse suggests marriage makes a woman almost impossibly happy, but the "emotional and unbalanced woman" discourse suggested that husbands prevent women from experiencing extreme highs: that is, happiness.

The discourse of "appearance"

"look good"
"look even more fabulous"
"sexier"
"you'll look...better than ever"
"My husband sees me looking rough...and still thinks I'm sex on legs" - Mary

It is pertinent that the concluding, and therefore more memorable, paragraph is concerned with the traditional representation of women: physical appearance. The assumption is that a woman's physical appearance should be perfect. Marriage is constructed as something that will lead to a woman's appearance being enhanced: a woman will look "sexier".

Implicitly, then, unmarried women are blighted, as they do not hold the resource to be perfect like married women. The assumption that women should be perfect has been internalised by Mary, who expresses gratitude that her husband is still interested in her, despite sometimes looking "rough".

Contradictorily, despite marriage having a positive

affect on a woman's appearance, Mary's comment suggests that married women will sometimes not look attractive; however, this does not matter, as owing to being married, husbands will always find their wives sexually attractive.

DISCUSSION

The findings from this study support Baumeister's (1986) suggestion that relationships contribute to the construction of identity.

This study has identified a number of discourses that suggest marriage has a positive effect on the identity of women. In the article, marriage is constructed as making women feel happier and sexier; more confident and secure; and more stable and in control.

Exposure to this article might result in some women having particularly high expectations of marriage; therefore, it is no wonder that, contemporary society, divorce is now more commonplace!

A possibility for future research would be to discover if general women's magazines contain articles on relationships that draw on the same discourses.

Discourse analysis produces results that are highly subjective and my own background and situation will have influenced what I found in this article. Being an unmarried woman in my thirties, I may have focused on topics that another person might not have believed particularly significant.

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